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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**Woman Marines in Counterinsurgency Operations:
Lioness and Female Engagement Teams**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: Women Marines in Counterinsurgency Operations: Lioness and Female Engagement Teams

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Thesis: Women's roles in counterinsurgency operations have proven to be a force multiplier regarding information operations and relation building. This paper will examine the employment of women Marines in Iraq and Afghanistan, specifically Lioness and Female Engagement Teams respectively. The detailed analysis of these two programs will prove women play a vital role in current counterinsurgency operations.

Discussion: Throughout history, women directly and indirectly support military efforts. Some taking drastic covert measures and disguised themselves as men in order to fight alongside their fellow male soldiers. The Department of Defense eventually allowed women to join the military; however, strict stipulations exist regarding billets and units assigned. During the course of the last 20 years, the character of war has changed; conventional fighting is no longer the norm and insurgent tactics more prevalent. Iraq and Afghanistan are examples of a congruent battlefield. There is no longer a front line or an identifiable rear area. The U.S. military has adapted to overcome the Middle Eastern cultural gender sensitivities by utilizing women Marines to engage with Iraqi and Afghan female population. Attaching Lioness and Female Engagement Teams to ground combat units is very successful in increasing security, information operations, and relations building.

Conclusion: As the character of war continues to change, the US military must as well. Asking more from our women Marines is one solution and they are up to the task. Task Force Lioness increased the security in Iraq and the FETs continue to enhance the U.S. Military intelligence operations in Afghanistan. Both programs are successful and prove women are a vital asset in counterinsurgency operations.

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Introduction

This paper will examine the employment of women Marines in Iraq and Afghanistan. This interaction of women Marines with the local population constitutes a force multiplier in the execution of counterinsurgency operations. The current mechanisms of this interaction are the Lioness teams in Iraq and Female Engagement Teams (FET) in Afghanistan. The detailed analysis of these two programs will prove women play a vital role in current counterinsurgency operations.

History

During the Revolutionary war, politics did not include women. Only men served in the military and federal law forbid women from being soldiers. Women followed the military for a number of reasons; fear of starvation, rape by the enemy soldiers, loneliness, imminent poverty, a last effort to follow their husbands.¹ Wanting to provide assistance, women's indirect support included opening their houses to traveling soldiers, boycotting British goods, following armies to wash, cook, and tend to the soldiers. These activities were good for some, but others wanted to support the war effort directly. Despite the regulations against it, more than 400 women served covertly in the Army during the civil war.² Some disguised themselves as men and fought alongside their fellow male soldiers while others served as spies.³

In early 1782, Timothy Thayer enlisted as a young soldier in support of the American Army's attempts to defeat the British. After a night of drinking, Thayer was kicked out of his regiment. He resolutely re-enlisted in the Light Infantry Company of the 4th Massachusetts Regiment under the name of Roger Shureleff. He participated in multiple battles and in 1783 received a coveted promotion to aide-de-camp for General John Patterson at West Point. During the summer of 1783, Shureleff became seriously ill. The treating physician discovered Shureleff

was not a man at all, but a woman by the name of Deborah Samson. Samson was arguably the most famous of the hundreds of women who served in the Continental Army.⁴

In 1812, during the Spanish American War, a Marine by the name of George Baker was serving aboard the USS Constitution. During his time aboard the ship, he was engaged in some of the bloodiest sea fights of the war. It was not discovered until years later, after publishing his autobiographical account of his experiences, that George Baker was identified as Lucy Brewer, a farm girl from Massachusetts. The Marine Corps was reluctant to acknowledge that women had served in their ranks before authorized in 1918. The discovery of Lucy Brewer's autobiography led the Marine Corps to acknowledge that she was perhaps the first woman Marine.⁵

In 1918, the Secretary of the Navy granted authority to enroll women in the Marine Corps Reserves for clerical duties. Subsequently, Opha May Johnson was the first "official" woman Marine to enlist. During World War I, 305 women enlisted in the Marine Corps in order to "free a man to fight."⁶

In 1948, Congress passed the Women's Armed Forces Integration Act, which authorized women in the regular component of the Marine Corps.⁷ Under this Act, women were eligible to serve in the regular active peacetime forces, but only under a litany of conditions including a stipulation that limited women to no more than 2% of the total force, and female officers could be no more than 10% of that 2%. The highest pay grade a woman could obtain was Lieutenant Colonel, and they could not have command authority over men. The only naval vessels that allowed women to serve were hospital ships.⁸

In 2009, there are more than 12,000 women in the Marine Corps including officer and enlisted ranks. This accounts for approximately 6% of the total Marine Corps strength.⁹ There

are still strict limitations on the military occupation specialties (MOS) women may perform within the Marine Corps. According to Department of Defense (DoD) policy and Marine Corps Order (MCO) P1300.8R, “women are excluded from serving in units below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground”.¹⁰ Brigades are ground combat units consisting of approximately 3,000 to 5,000 soldiers whose primary mission is to close with and destroy enemy forces. A brigade is equivalent to a Marine regiment. According to DoD, which encompasses all the armed services, direct ground combat is defined as: “engaging an enemy on the ground with individual or crew-served weapons while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with the hostile forces personnel. Direct ground combat takes place well forward of the battlefield while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, or shock effect.”¹¹

Marine Corps Order (MCO) P1300.8R specifically lists MOSs that women are restricted from filling; infantry, artillery, tanks and assault amphibious vehicles. Women Marines fill MOSs that provide combat service support, however they are not assigned “to any unit within which they will routinely become engaged in direct ground combat operations as a primary mission.”¹² This was expected in a traditional warfare scenario but the rules were often stretched to cover military requirements and wartime expediency. In a counterinsurgency (COIN) environment there is no forward battlefield; direct physical contact happens everywhere, on secure Forward Operating Bases (FOBs), convoys, or routine air missions. Women who serve in the armed forces during the 2000s, providing combat service support in a COIN environment, run the risk of exposure to direct and indirect enemy fire.

Since 1918, women have been serving in combat service support roles, not direct combat roles. The rationale behind restricting women from combat arms MOSs; women would not be

on the front line engaging with the enemy, rather they would be in the rear secured area, away from the enemy, providing support to the ground combat units. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown the battlefield has become congruent. In a COIN environment, there is no front line or rear area and the enemy is illusive. Women providing combat service support in Iraq and Afghanistan are no longer safe from the enemy and are as vulnerable to receiving direct hostile fire and indirect fire as their male counterparts.

In a COIN environment, the population is the center of gravity. By winning the support of the population, the insurgent forces can be subdued. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, approximately half of the population is female and due to cultural differences, male service members cannot interact with them at all. Because of these cultural differences, women service members must interact with them by attaching to units that routinely engage in direct ground combat operations. This action does not coincide with DoD and Marine Corps policy.

Throughout Iraq, male Marines and male Iraqi police manned entry control points (ECP) and traffic control points (TCP) screening for explosives and illegal items prior to allowing Iraqi men passage through the checkpoint. The Muslim culture is sensitive to non-family males, especially non-Muslim males, searching Muslim women.¹³ Due to cultural sensitivity, Iraqi women were allowed to pass without being searched providing insurgents an avenue to exploit: Iraqi women and Iraqi males disguised as women had unrestricted access through ECPs and TCPs. The Marine Corps identified, acknowledged, and mitigated this issue by creating Task Force Lioness, teams of women Marines. These Lioness teams implemented culturally sensitive search methods to deter the enemy from using women to conduct terrorist attacks.¹⁴

Lioness Teams

It is not clear who initiated the creation of the Lioness teams, but in 2005, both the Army and the Marine Corps trained and employed them. The creation of Lioness teams mitigated the security limitation identified at the control points and allowed an acceptable means of searching the local female populace.¹⁵ These teams were created in an ad hoc fashion utilizing women that were already deployed in-country filling other job requirements.¹⁶ The first teams received very little if any training other than basic search techniques which were typically taught “on the job” at an ECP.¹⁷

In 2006, Multi National Forces West (MNF-W) officially established Task Force Lioness and published guidance on staffing this all women task force.¹⁸ The Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) tasked both the Marine Aviation Wing (MAW) and the Marine Logistics Group (MLG) to provide a set number of women Marines each month to serve as Lioness team members. These women received five to ten days of training consisting of BZOing their weapons, weapons familiarization firing including the AK-47, female search techniques, ECP practical application, culture and basic language training, escalation of force and counter improvised explosive devise training, Marine Corps martial arts program (MCMAP) refresher specifically focusing on take down techniques, instruction on how to work with interpreters, rules of engagement and law of war training, detainee operations, intelligence gathering training, and current threat briefs.¹⁹ Upon completion of training, the women were split into 4-5 person teams and sent to support a ground combat unit. They worked and lived with that unit for 30 days. At the conclusion of 30 days, the women returned to their parent unit. If a woman desired to stay for another 30 days, she requested permission to extend through her chain of command.²⁰

Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) Terrence Washington served as RCT-2's Regimental Gunner when they deployed to Iraq in December 2006 to January 2008. As the Regimental Gunner, he served as the infantry weapons officer within the Regiment, advising the commander on the tactical employment of the weapons organic to that infantry unit.²¹ CWO Washington was in charge of training the Lioness teams that supported RCT-2. When he arrived in-theatre, there were five women in the Lioness program. During his deployment, the program grew to approximately 24 females in support of RCT-2 totaling 5-6 Lioness teams. He was responsible for ensuring the Lioness members received all the training mentioned above and providing their life support, ie: chow, billeting, head facilities, etc. After completing the requisite training, CWO Washington sent the Lioness teams to the companies at Combat Outposts (COPs) where these teams staffed ECPs and TCPs for 30 days. The supported company assumed responsibility of the Lioness team. The incoming and outgoing Lioness teams conducted a three-day turnover, upon completion the incoming team assumed responsibility and the outgoing women returned to their parent unit.²²

Sergeant (Sgt) Rachael Ramey, a participant of a Lioness team, relates her experience. Sgt Ramey (then Corporal Ramey) originally deployed to Fallujah as part of Headquarters and Service Battalion, II MEF from October 2007 to May 2008. During her deployment, she volunteered to be part of the Lioness program. She received 5 days notice before she left Fallujah to conduct the five-day training mentioned above at Al Asad Air Base. Upon completion of her training, Sgt Ramey was sent to a COP in Habbiniyah where she attached to Lima Company 3rd Battalion, 23rd Marines, a reserve infantry unit from Montgomery, Alabama. Her Lioness team consisted of five women Marines ranked corporal and below. There was one

female Staff Non-Commissioned Officer (SNCO) in Habbiniyah who traveled to RCT-2's five different COPs to check the welfare and performance of the Lioness teams.²³

In Habbiniyah two ECPs/TCPs were manned during daylight hours. The Lioness teams did not travel during the day, they moved to and from their post before dawn and after sunset.²⁴ The average workday began at 0430 with preparing to move to the ECP and lasted until 2230 or upon completion of the daily debrief with the Intel Officer.²⁵ Habbiniyah had five Lioness members, these five women split into 2 two person teams, a searcher and a "guardian angel" that provided security for the searcher. The two person teams worked the ECP and TCP while the fifth woman served as a floater allowing for a rest day every fifth day or filled in if someone was ill. Sgt Ramey served as the searcher for her team while her fellow Lioness team member was her "guardian angel".²⁶

As the Iraqi women approached the ECP they were escorted to a searching area, created out of Hesco barriers, separating the women from the men. If the Iraqi women were uncomfortable with the Lioness Marines (confusing them for males), the team removed their Kevlar helmets and glasses. This showed the Iraqi women that the Lioness members were in fact female and seemed to put them at ease.²⁷

During her two months as part of the Lioness team (she extended for a second month), Sgt Ramey did not encounter Iraqis women carrying explosives, or men disguised as women at her control point; however, she frequently observed women carrying sums of money.²⁸

From an operational point of view, Task Force Lioness was a huge success.²⁹ Lioness teams increased security measures by addressing the female population that was previously unapproachable due to cultural sensitivities. According to one Lioness after action report, that particular TCP averaged 90-100 female Iraqis searched daily.³⁰ Contraband items encountered

included weapons, currency exceeding \$5000, anti-coalition propaganda, photos of military personnel and sites, and men disguised as women.³¹

When created, Task Force Lioness was not intended to be an enduring military mission: local Iraqis women were to be trained and eventually take over. In early December 2007, a group of local Iraqi women formed a group known as Sisters of Fallujah (SoF) who worked together with the Lioness teams at ECPs and TCPs.³² Later that December, 24 additional Iraqi women were trained and graduated from a searching and screening program conducted in Fallujah. The US military also worked with the female Iraqi Police encouraging them to take over the searching mission at ECPs.³³ “By having the locals contribute to the safety of their own ensures that we are moving forward within the community dealing a severe blow to the insurgency.”³⁴ Since the withdrawal of Marines in Iraq, women Marines have not conducted any further Lioness missions.

Female Engagement Teams

In Afghanistan, there are no indications of women participating in insurgent operations. Pashtun women pose minimum, if any, threat to Marines, male or female. This allows the Marines to focus on proactive interaction with the Pashtun women.³⁵

Female Engagement Teams (FET) started as a concept in 2008. Lieutenant Colonel (LtCol) David Odom, the Commanding Officer of Ground Combat Element (GCE), 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines (3/8) approached LtCol Michael Jernigan, the Commanding Officer of Combat Logistics Battalion 3 (CLB-3), and together they developed the FET concept; a team of women Marines attached to infantry units to conduct engagements with Afghan women.³⁶

CLB-3 provided a female Pashtu interpreter and a cadre of seven women Marines (the Aviation Command Element provided two of these women) for this job. The women Marines

received approximately 3 days of training including; BZOing of their weapon, culture classes, search techniques, basic Pashtu language, tactical questioning, and speaking with the use of an interpreter.³⁷ This cadre of women was the first FET that conducted substantive engagements with the female Afghan population in support of 3/8's information operations.³⁸

Second Lieutenant(Lt) Johannah Shaffer was the officer in charge of the first FET. She and her team accompanied one of 3/8's companies to a local village. 3/8's mission, to search several of the houses and talk to the local men. The company commander and a member of the Afghan National Police (ANP) talked to the village elder, explained their mission, and out of respect for their culture he did not want any of his male Marines to encounter the local women. The village elder granted permission for the Afghan women to meet with the FET while the Marines conducted their searches and interviews. All the village women and children gathered in a house where the FET visited them for several hours and distributed school supplies and hygiene items. Each FET member had a specific duty during the engagement: 3 were "guardian angels" providing security, one searched the Afghan women before the actual visit began, one was a photographer, one was a note taker, and Lt Shaffer was the spokesperson who communicated using the interpreter. During the engagement, the women Marines removed their Kevlar helmets allowing the Afghan women to observe that they too were wearing headscarves; this seemed to calm the Afghan women and opened the lines of communication. This single engagement was a huge success for Marines in terms of information operations and human relations.³⁹ The FET was able to gather valuable information and promoted Coalition Forces in a positive manner to a segment of the population that had not been influenced otherwise.⁴⁰

Communication between the FET and the Afghan women is crucial to building enduring relationships. During this first engagement, the FET explained to the Afghan women what their

mission was and why they were in the village. They emphasized that the Marines were not there to harm them; their mission was to help them, keep them safe, to understand what it was like to be an Afghan woman living in their village, and to understand the dynamics/relationships within their tribe and community. They explained that the male Marines were in their village to search homes looking for specific improvised explosive devise materials. The FET emphasized that the Marines were there to make things safer and that they were not going to be leaving Afghanistan any time soon.⁴¹

This same FET revisited that village a couple days later. Several of the women were very confused and upset that their husbands, brothers or fathers were detained and were concerned about the fate of their men. Lt Shaffer explained why the men had been detained, that no harm was going to be done to them, and eventually the men would be released and returned to their homes. The FET reiterated their mission, handed out more humanitarian aid, listened to grievances and answered questions. The Afghan women were very receptive of this engagement and very appreciative of the information received.⁴²

During these two FET visits, three key things were learned about the Afghan population previously misconceived: 1. The assumption that an entire village would be furious because some of their tribal members had been detained was in fact not the case. Some tribal members appeared to be appreciative.⁴³ 2. The presence of American women would outrage the Afghan males. The Afghan males were very receptive to the FET interacting with their women; they were not offended or outraged. A majority of the Pashtun men viewed the female Marines as a “third gender”. The FET women were extended the respect shown to men, also granted the access reserved for women.⁴⁴ 3. That Afghan women have no say in what goes on in their village. Afghan women have significant influence with their husbands, brothers and especially

their adolescent sons.⁴⁵ Having the opportunity to interact with the FET has educated the Afghan women and empowered them with knowledge, and they in turn have influenced their husbands and sons to work with the Marines.⁴⁶ The Afghan culture has proven to be more flexible than originally thought; these realities would not have been discovered had it not been for the FET.⁴⁷

In 2009, as the end drew near for 3/8 and CLB-3's deployment, CLB 3's intelligence officer Lt Matt Pottinger, who served as the mentor, trainer, and debriefer for the FET, wrote a brief synopsis of the FET mission, capability, after action report of their engagements, and submitted it to the intelligence section of 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade – Afghanistan (MEB-A). Lt Pottinger requested to stay in-theatre and work with the MEB training future FET to support the entire MEB's area of operation (AO). The MEB intelligence section was unable to find a way to keep him so he returned to his parent command back in Okinawa.⁴⁸ Shortly thereafter, Lt Pottinger was requested to return to Afghanistan and work in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) intelligence section, which allowed him to continue working with the FET program.⁴⁹

As the concept of the FET became known in Afghanistan there were concerns at all levels of leadership regarding their mission and their employment. Was their employment in accordance with DoD and Marine Corps policy? Was utilizing women Marines in this capacity legal? In September of 2009, Central Command (CENTCOM) Staff Judge Advocate (SJA) released a "Memorandum of Law Concerning Women in Combat Support Operations." This memo looked at several different models in which women could provide a specific skill in conditions where gender differences were of consequence. CENTCOM SJA analyzed these models using the DoD and Service policies. It was concluded that women could be assigned and employed in the battlefield as the FET had been and that the FET were in compliance with the

current law set forth by both DoD and Service policies. This memorandum from CENTCOM condones women serving as FETs in Afghanistan, emphasizing that it is legal to employ them in this manner.⁵⁰

In 2009, Marine Expeditionary Force – Afghanistan (MEB-A) took the FET concept and expanded it into a fully supported program. This effort came after an incident when a group of insurgents, surrounded by Marines, was able to escape masquerading as women and slipping through the Marine cordon.⁵¹ The missions that the FET have conducted as of December 2009 include searching women at polling sites and checkpoints, running medical clinics, distribution of over-the-counter medicines, distribution of humanitarian aid, and conducting engagements in Afghan homes.⁵²

As of February 2009, all FET were staffed in an ad hoc manner and the FET mission was a collateral duty. Capt Jennifer Gregoire, an intelligence officer deployed with VMA-214, a harrier squadron out of Yuma, Arizona, volunteered for the FET program. Capt Gregoire attended the five-day training provided at Camp Leatherneck, consisting of: BZOing their weapon, ranges that focused on firing their weapons while moving, Afghan history and culture classes, social science classes, search techniques, MCMAP training focusing on take down procedures, basic Pashto language classes, and communicating through the use of an interpreter. Upon completing the training and conducting at least one FET mission, Capt Gregoire was assigned to manage the FET program working directly for 2nd MEB's Intelligence Section in the Information Operations cell. With the program in her control, she incorporated additional training to include: convoy training, counter improvised explosive device (CIED) training, more range time, and a weekly one day refresher course for those FET members physically located at Camp Leatherneck.⁵³

Lt Jessica Bilkovich, serving as a watch officer for CLB-8 located at FOB Camp Dwyer, with five other female Marines from her unit, attended the five-day training at Camp Leatherneck. Upon completion they returned to FOB Camp Dwyer where Lt Bilkovich was put in charge of training and managing future FETs at Camp Dwyer. These FETs supported 2nd Battalion 8th Marines (2/8) and 2nd Light Armor Reconnaissance Battalion (2d LAR). Lt Bilkovich altered the training slightly adding a life savers course (advanced first aid training) and increased the amount of training with the interpreter.⁵⁴ In total, Capt Gregoire trained 40 females at Camp Leatherneck and Lt Bilkovich trained 25 females at FOB Dwyer.⁵⁵ The assignments Lt Bilkovich's FET included searching women at polling stations during the elections, engaging rural Pashtun women in their villages, and assisting with medical clinics.⁵⁶

1stLt Hannah Sides, a Logistics Officer serving as the Logistics Officer (S4) for Combat Logistics Battalion 8 (CLB-8), served as a FET leader during her deployment from May to October, 2009. Lt Sides conducted two FET missions. The first entailed searching Afghan women at a polling station before they voted in the national election. The FET was ready to execute the mission, however, no women showed up to vote.⁵⁷

The second entailed the FET conducting a two-week long mission with 2d LAR. 2d LAR, working through village elders, arranged for several FET visits with the local women in their homes and for the FET to conduct a medical clinic specifically for the Afghan women. Word of the upcoming medical clinic spread via advertising on the local radio station and word of mouth.⁵⁸ Upon completion of their first village engagement, Lt Sides and her FET went to the local bazaar, which created excitement and a warmer reception on their subsequent visits to villages. Many Afghan women anticipated the opportunity to meet the American women. One woman said, "I prayed you (America women) would come to us."⁵⁹

The presence of women Marines softened the interaction with the local men and children as well. One older gentleman who opened his home to the FET said, "Your men come to fight, but we know the women are here to help."⁶⁰ A male Marine approached by an Afghan man during a patrol was thanked for bringing the women to assist with the local people.⁶¹

Over the course of the 14 day mission, the FET conducted seven visits and three medical clinics; over-the-counter medicines were distributed and some local women were advised to seek further medical attention from a doctor.⁶² Overall, the mission was a success demonstrating FETs are a valuable asset working from an established combat outpost in a semi-permissive environment interacting with Afghan women in their homes, thereby creating positive relationships.⁶³

FETs have advanced since the inception of the program in 2008; however, there are several issues that need to be addressed. The first issue: the need for physically fit, mission oriented, fluent Pashto speaking female linguists. The majority of linguists in-country are fluent in Dari, however, the engagements are occurring in areas where Pashto is spoken. Linguists must be stern, they must interact with the local populace and reject men who attempt to insert themselves into FET engagements. Only one female Pashto interpreter was available when the FET first started conducting missions. She was an older, out of shape woman who had problems keeping up with the patrols while walking to villages. On one occasion, she collapsed from heat exhaustion after walking a few hundred meters in her protective equipment.⁶⁴ The second issue: confusion between FET and Lioness capabilities. Lioness' sole mission: searching Iraqi women. FETs interact with the Afghan women building relationships, collecting information regarding village atmospherics, which in turn creates an accepting environment between the Marines and the local Afghan population.⁶⁵ The third issue: the ad hoc manner in which FET are

staffed and employed. There is no continuity between the FET themselves or between the FET and the unit they support.⁶⁶

Each FET is led by a mature staff non-commissioned officer (SNCO) or an officer, who possesses good communication and people skills. The senior member of the FET serves as the speaker who interacts with the local Afghan women through an interpreter. She has to be able to keep the conversation moving without turning engagements into interviews, have a firm understanding of what their mission is, know what the end state is, and fully understand the cultural difference between Afghan people (specifically the Pashtun culture) and Americans. The senior FET member also coordinates their mission with the supported unit commander, which is typically a Lieutenant or a Captain. The senior member is responsible for ensuring her FET knows their duties and responsibilities, accounts for them during movement, and their overall safety.⁶⁷

During the research of this topic one name continued to surface whenever questions concerning manning, training, or employment of future FET were asked. That name was LtCol Julie Nethercot, the Commanding Officer of 9th Communications Battalion. LtCol Nethercot has taken the lead for I Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) on all matters relating to future FET. She learned of the Lioness and FET programs through talking to women who had previously participated in the Lioness program and were now checking into her Battalion. LtCol Nethercot decided the women serving in these unique billets did not receive adequate training.⁶⁸

LtCol Nethercot contacted several people in Afghanistan and found researched out how the FETs were currently being staffed, trained, employed, and recommendations on how to make the program more effective. She then created her concept of the FET: a group of women selected solely to conduct FET missions that would train and develop standard operating

procedures (SOP) while in the United States prior to deployment. She drafted an intense four month training schedule culminating with the FET participating in Enhanced Mojave Viper (EMV), a 30 day combined arms exercise that includes security and stabilization operations training in 29 Palms, California. During EMV, the FET would be in direct support of the ground combat element. LtCol Nethercot presented her FET concept to Lieutenant General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., the I MEF Commanding General. The CG acknowledged the value of the FET capability and the need to improve the FET program. Subsequently LtCol Nethercot received 14 women Marines that executed the four-month training plan. Their training included: Pashtu language, culture, MCMAp, multiple live fire ranges, combat life saver, basic patrolling, radio procedures, blue force tracker, casualty evacuation procedures, improvised explosive device, searching techniques for vehicles and people, working with an interpreter, leadership, civil military operations, media training.⁶⁹ The intent of the FET is to provide the GCE commander with a capability he can utilize in support of operations concerning the female population of Afghanistan.

In the first week of February 2009, 14 FET members completed EMV and 31 more women checked into the FET program to begin their training. There are 45 women currently in the FET pipeline under LtCol Nethercot's tutelage. Future leadership/ownership of the FET remains a question that I MEF is addressing, but for now, LtCol Nethercot owns that responsibility. The FET program, once in-theatre, will be a MEF asset supporting the entire MEF forward area of operations.⁷⁰

Conclusion

History reveals courageous women who first entered the military disguised as men. Their bravery led to the admission of women into the armed forces although there were very specific limitations. Women were restricted from engaging “in direct combat on the ground,” and assigned positions in rear secured areas. Through insurgent warfare as in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is no longer a front or a rear area. As warfare changes, the military too has changed. New units consisting of women have been developed strictly to support the Marines in ground combat units; Task Force Lioness and Female Engagement Teams.

Lioness teams were developed in 2004-2005 timeframe to support units in Iraqi. Their mission to search only the female population at control points; ECPs and TCPs. Hitherto, the female population in Iraqi was passing through without being searched because of Middle Eastern gender sensitive customs prohibited male-to-female contact.

These Lioness teams began with very basic training received “on the job.” In 2006, Task Force Lioness was officially established through MNF-W and guidance was published concerning the staffing of the Lioness’. Task Force Lioness increased the security measures in Iraq and was deemed a huge success by the units employing them.

Once again, Middle Eastern gender sensitive customs forbid male-to-female exchanges in Afghanistan, limiting interaction with the population. In 2008, Commanding Officer LtCol David Odom, Ground Combat Element (GCE) 3 Battalion, 8th Marines (3/8) and LtCol Michael Jernigan, Commanding Officer of Combat Logistic Battalion 3 (CLB 3), began developing the concept of military women in Afghanistan employed to visit the Afghanistan female population directly in their villages and homes. These women were the first Female Engagement Team.

Their mission was to build relationships, distribute humanitarian aid, thereby learning the dynamics/relationships within the tribes and communities. Through these missions, FET dispelled several misconceptions about the populace and the culture; empowered the Afghan women through communications conducted during these visits, which in turn enhanced interaction between Afghan men and the troops. The FET program continues to enhance the U.S. Military intelligence operations in Afghanistan.

As FET continue to be employed in Afghanistan, there have been improvements regarding the staffing, training and employment of this capability. Suggestions to further develop the FET continue to surface as the demands for this capability increases. Women must be designated to conducted FET missions as their primary job for the duration of their deployment. FET training needs to be standardized across the MEFs and incorporated into EMV combined arms exercise conducted prior to deployment. As FET continue to be employed in a proactive offensive manner producing positive impacts on operations in Afghanistan, they need to be supported and empowered to the best of the Marine Corps ability.

Both the Lioness and Female Engagement Team programs have proven to be a beneficial capability delivering huge gains by interacting with a portion of the population that the male Marines could not engage. Both programs have shown that the role of the female Marine has changed and plays a significant role in counterinsurgency operations. The reality of the positive effects produced enhance any unit these teams are assigned to and has been embraced and supported from the General Officer level to the Lieutenants and Captains employing them. This is a great start, however, the capability needs to be recognized Marine Corps wide. Guidance needs to come from the Commandant mandating all MEFs create a FET capability that supports the entire MEF AO when deployed.

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²² Washington interview

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